



Environmental Planning and Compliance Overview

Introduction

Environmental Planning and Compliance in the NPS involves planning for resource protection, facilitating public input on NPS decisions, and conducting environmental assessments. The Natural Resource Branch is charged with implementation of the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969 (NEPA) as well as a host of other environmental laws and regulations.

Management Needs

Although much of the work performed by the Natural Resource Branch related to planning and compliance is required by law or policy, the primary impetus lies with the value of using review and decision-making mechanisms to assure that park resources are protected. While designation of a unit of the National Park System automatically suspends certain kinds of uses and activities, park resources, allowable visitor activities, and park operations are anything but static. Within the context of frequent change, it is imperative that deliberate planning and assessment take place. Staff members of the Branch therefore provide reviews and consultations related to issues such as threatened and endangered species, air pollutant emissions, water pollutant discharges, wetland protection, and general environmental protection.



Collecting GPS data for mapping.

Current Procedures

Resource Planning at Shenandoah is comprised of two primary documents, the General Management Plan and the Resource Stewardship Plan. The park's General Management Plan is out of date and should be revised in the next several years. In anticipation of the GMP revision, the Branch is currently engaged in preparation of a Natural Resource Assessment. This document will summarize what is known about park natural resources, point out critical voids in information, and suggest desired future

conditions. Resource Stewardship Plans are new and replace what was known as a Resource Management Plan. Shenandoah does not have a Resource Stewardship Plan and the most recent Resource Management Plan was completed in 1998. In addition, a series of Action Plans (Fire Management, Deer Management, Integrated Pest Management, etc.) are in various stages of development.

A Park Directive is in place that guides staff through the compliance process. Roughly 50- 60 projects are considered each year and subjected to environmental, historic preservation, and wilderness review. The vast majority of these projects are categorically excluded from further NEPA review. In certain instances, additional consultations, permits, and documentation are required. In a handful of circumstances, Environmental Assessments must be prepared. The park is currently working on the following assessments:

- Fire Management Plan
- Skyline Drive and Overlooks Rehabilitation
- Oral Rabies Vaccination

PEPC (Planning, Environment and Public Comment) is an online collaborative tool dedicated to facilitating the NEPA process in conservation planning, environmental impact analysis and informed decision-making. PEPC supports the National Park Service's project planning, compliance tracking, comment analysis and response, as well as public communication efforts. PEPC will replace some aspects of the process that Shenandoah currently has in place but details of PEPC implementation are still being worked out.

References

The following Environmental Assessments and Findings of No Significant Impact have been completed recently:

- Old Rag Parking Area
- Headquarters Fire Suppression System
- Panorama Facility Rehabilitation